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Painting the Enemy in Motion: Film from both sides of the Pacific War

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Painting the Enemy in Motion: Film from both sides of the Pacific War

On December 7, 1941, American eyes were focused on a new enemy. With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, no longer were Americans concerned only with the European front, but suddenly an attack on American soil led to a quick chain reaction. By the next day, a declaration of war was requested by President Roosevelt for “a date that will live on in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan...”¹ and the United States had a new enemy to face. Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, war related cinema had focused on the European front with films such as *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), *Four Sons* (1940), *the Great Dictator* (1940) and *A Yank in the RAF* (1941). All of these films stressed ideological themes, democracy versus Nazi dictatorship, brotherly love versus treachery, and overall American superiority.

Then, in 1942, President Roosevelt created the Office of War Information (OWI), to make sure that the proper message was sent out to the American public. In order for America to win the war, the OWI had to be incorporated in every aspect of the American life. From the Sunday morning funnies to movies, it was vital that the OWI controlled exactly what the American people saw and felt towards the war. To do this, the government began creating propaganda posters, movies and cartoons. Although the message was essentially the same --- that

¹John Morton Blum, *V was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 1.

the war would be long and hard but it would end in victory -- the messages for the Pacific conflict with Japan was more concerned with racial paradigms than ideology. While the racial paradigms were woven in all productions of the OWI, it was clearest in films, shown to both the public and the soldiers.

Pre-war films concerning the Japanese always treated them as aliens within the United States and there was no strong attempt to separate the Chinese from the Japanese.

Persistent from the earliest films was the idea of diabolical Orientals. They continually plotted and connived the destruction of America in general and white women in particular. The Orientals were never what they seemed to be. Ruthless and clever—one is tempted to conclude, more so than white men- they serve with great subtlety and infinite patience of the goal of the eventual mastery by the yellow race.²

The Adventures of Kathlyn (1910), *The Yellow Menace* (1916), and *Typhoon* (1921) were films that clearly portrayed this imagery associated with Orientals in general—never were they broken down by nationality, only that they were Asian. Nonetheless, the threat was portrayed as real: “The Japanese posed not only the threat of racial mongrelization...[but also] great adaptability to western ways, [and] aggressiveness in economic competition,” and consequently were an absolute and dangerous threat.³

The filmic story, in both cases, was based on the idea of racial inferiority. The desire to grasp racial imagery against the Japanese led many people in the United States to fear an all out race war was brewing on the horizon, where whites would have to fight against all the other nationalities of the world. As John Dower noted in his work, *War without Mercy*, World War II

²Richard A. Oehling, “Hollywood and the Image of the Oriental, 1910-1950—Part I,” *Film and History*, 8:3 (September 1978), 35.

³*Ibid.*, 33.

was "...a race war. It exposed raw prejudices and was fueled by racial pride, arrogance and rage...."⁴

Governmental control of media during wartime was at first very lenient, if existing at all. With the failure of the Office of Facts and Figures, headed up by Archibald McLiesh, to try and control what the American public saw, very little was censored or specifically directed. However, once America was thrown into the war, the government needed a way to control and direct the public's sympathy, anger and most importantly, hatred.

In Executive Order 9182, President Roosevelt created the Office of War Information. Headed by a broadcaster and journalist, Elmer Davis, the OWI had many sectors, including sections specifically dedicated to the production of wartime movies and propaganda. The OWI incorporated the former failed attempt to control wartime media, the Office of Government Reports (OGR). This agency was very unpopular with politicians as well as the general public, after attack from republicans as being Roosevelt's propaganda house, even getting the nickname of OGRE (despite the claims by Republicans, the Office of Government Reports never acted as a proper propaganda agency).⁵ However, immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt created the single entity of the OWI to make the Government's requests known to the public, and to offer assistance to the war effort.⁶ The OWI had a mission: To bring its message

⁴John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 5.

⁵*Ibid.*, 21.

⁶Thomas B. Christie and Andrew M. Clark, "Framing Two Enemies in Mass Media: a content Analysis of U.S. Government Influence in American Film during World War II," *American Journalism*, 25:1 (Winter 2008), 59. In World War I, the government created entity of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) that had controlled all forms of media available to shift public opinion and support towards the war and its efforts. Although with the forming of the commercial empire in America, the public had grown to be weary of the so-called 'truths' that the advertisements supposedly spoke of, which made public opinion about propaganda also

to the people of the United States -- and with approximately eighty million Americans attending the movies a week, sixteen thousand theaters throughout the country that could seat eleven million people at one time -- the use of film as a method of propaganda was the most obvious choice.

The Pacific War was a race war on all sides—from the Americans to the Japanese. America had a deep history with racism, and that racism became key to the Pacific War. Racist themes began to emerge quickly. The Japanese were seen as having no individual thought, of being tricky, sneaky and treacherous, also of lacking emotion, being ruthless and of being either subhuman or superhuman, but never being equal to the humanity of the Western forces. These racial imageries were clearest in three movies, *Bataan* (1943), *Guadalcanal Diaries* (1943) and *Know Your Enemy—Japan* (1945). These three movies stick true to all the racial stereotypes, and more.

Released June 3, 1943, *Bataan* was considered MGM's response to Paramount's *Wake Island*. Produced by Irving Star and directed by Tay Garnett, the fictional story as of a real battle, the Battle of Bataan. The battle occurred shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Bataan and the US and Filipino forces on the island were attacked by Japanese planes. The Japanese attacks quickly cut off the US and isolated Filipino forces from outside reinforcement and supplies.

The film *Bataan* opens with the scene of Americans retreating from the island of Bataan, all injured, tired and disheartened. Suddenly, Japanese planes bomb the retreating soldiers, killing innocent women and children, and destroying a Red Cross aid van. Desperate, the army sends a group of thirteen volunteers (two Filipinos, one sailor, an air force officer, a Latino, a

relatively wary. The CPI had succeeded in generating hate and anti-German hysteria during World War I and the Roosevelt administration was unwilling to see a repeat. Nonetheless, after it was clear that war was on the horizon – notably in Europe – Roosevelt was very unwilling to create another such institution, prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. See Winkler, 5.

black engineer, a sergeant and a West-Point soldier) deep into the jungle to slow the Japanese progression by destroying a key bridge. The thirteen men are slowly picked off by Japanese snipers, forever invisible and undefeatable. Despite destroying the bridge multiple times, the Japanese army, under the cover of night, is always there to repair it. After the air force officer is injured, he sacrifices himself by slamming an airplane into the bridge. After that, the Japanese begin all out attacks.

The moment the Japanese reveal themselves, they are easily killed. They are far from the invincible force that they appeared when they were hidden. Quickly they shifted from superhuman to subhuman upon revealing themselves. In a red-light-green-light like game of deception, the Japanese army sneaks up on the remaining American heroes, seen as almost animal like. Once they are shown, the few Americans are able to kill hundreds of Japanese soldiers, with seeming ease. But finally, only three American heroes remain. The Japanese send a note telling the Americans that they would treat them nicely should they surrender, and promised their safety. Immediately after, however, one of the soldiers is killed. The next soldier is stabbed in the back by a Japanese soldier that was pretending to be dead. In the final climatic scene, the remaining American soldier plows down the approaching Japanese, leaving the audience with the final words of “Come and get it, suckers. We’re still here—we’ll always be here—come and get it.”⁷

Although fictional, *Bataan* was hailed widely as the most successful film for the portrayal of the American hero. The OWI hailed the film as an over-all success, stressing the democratic nature of the group of soldiers. Throughout the movie, superior officers listen carefully to the

⁷ “Bataan,” Directed by Tay Garnett (June 3, 1943). This sort of plot is very similar to monster movies—the monster is undefeatable as long as it is invisible, but the moment it leaps onto the screen, it can be killed with seeming ease.

advice of the underlings. As the OWI noted, "...Thus, the army reflects the democratic way of life—which is one way of demonstrating the difference between our ideology and the fascist doctrine."⁸ Another thing the OWI praised about *Bataan* was "...the thirteen Americans [were not] professional soldiers—they were soda jerks, salesmen, farmers and teachers before the war. The American soldier was the common man. *Bataan* illustrated that 'this is a people's army, fighting a people's war.'"⁹ The OWI hailed *Bataan* as a useful film for inspiring the public and even suggested it for foreign release.

Not only was *Bataan* successful with the government but with critics too. Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* hailed *Bataan* because it actually portrayed the Black soldier, writing that "Kenneth Spencer has quiet strength and simple dignity as a Negro soldier from the engineers—a character whose placement in the picture is one of the outstanding merits of it...."¹⁰ Howard Barnes of the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote that *Bataan* was "a grim and uncompromising war film,"¹¹ and that it "has heroic dimensions and a melodramatic and emotional intensity that cannot be ignored. Its tribute to the expendables who fought a desperate delaying action on a peninsula of the Philippines is as stirring as it is somber...."¹² The reviewer at *Time* said that "Bataan's scenery is 'realistic' down to the last cartload of tropical foliage—and its drama is constantly loud and overemphatic. But there are a few stretches when the

⁸Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: The Free Press, a Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1987), 258.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Kenneth Spencer was the actor who played one of the black soldiers in the film.

¹¹Joe Morella, Edward Z. Epstein and John Griggs, *The films of WWII: A Pictorial Treasure of Hollywood's War Years* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1973), 134.

¹² *Ibid.*

military situation calls for silence, the noisy sound track quiets down and, for a moment, incredibly enough, Hollywood's war takes on the tense, classic values of understatement."¹³

Guadalcanal Diaries (1943) is a far more pungent film when it comes to rubbing Hollywood's stereotypes in the faces of the audience. The movie, based on a best-selling book of the same title, was directed by Lewis Seiler and produced by Bryan Foy and was released November 17, 1943. A few months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese forces had successfully captured several pacific islands, including the island of Guadalcanal. The island was important in providing a connection between New Zealand, Australia and the United States. American forces landed on the island on August 7, 1942 to reclaim the island, hoping to use it as a base to support their pacific campaign. The Allied forces overwhelmed the Japanese forces, and after several large battles and air strikes, the Japanese finally abandoned the island to American forces.

The movie *Guadalcanal Dairies* opens with a boat full of soldiers ready to be delivered into battle. The soldiers are relaxing and cheerfully chatting. The main characters introduced to the audience is an ex-Cabbie from Brooklyn named Aloysius Potts (played by William Bendix), whose obsession with the Dodgers is disturbing, a tough veteran sergeant named Hook Malone (played by Lloyd Nolan), Don Davis (played by Richard Conte), a captain whose devotion to his men is strong, Soos Alvarez (played by Anthony Quinn), represents the minorities of America while only thinking of women awaiting him at home, and finally Richard Jaeckel starred as the young soldier, Johnny Anderson, who was entering battle for the first time. The ship, and the first few days arriving on the island are easy enough, with no injuries what-so-ever, and when the soldiers discover an abandoned Japanese base, they believe the island to be disserted, but at that

¹³*Ibid.*

moment, one soldier is killed by snipers. The tension began to build as a narrator explained that the Japanese were lurking around in the jungle, and the rest of the film was dedicated to showcasing Japanese treachery. During a stormy night, Potts wrestled with a tree branch in his sleep, and sheepishly explained that he thought it was a Japanese soldier, saying “I swore I could see his buck teeth.”¹⁴ A young soldier shoots into the bushes on the same night, was reprimanded by his officers, and slowly goes back to his post, as the camera pans to show the audience the Japanese soldier hiding in the bushes. The next day, the young soldier is dead. Captured Japanese soldiers claimed that there were starving and dying soldiers on the beach, waiting to surrender. When a boat of men goes to capture the soldiers, they are ambushed by the Japanese, and only one soldier was able to escape alive. During an important battle scene, the young soldier, Anderson, turned to his sergeant and asked him how he felt about killing people. The sergeant replied, “Well, its kill or be killed -- besides, they ain’t people.”¹⁵ But despite that, the soldiers do not seem to take pleasure in their acts, and many of them longed for the comforts of home. The soldier who did not receive a letter from home wandered off into the forest in a fit of depression and was killed. As the fighting progressed, the soldiers discover the Japanese had hidden in caves, and the narrator explained to the audience “[the Japanese soldier] is a constant menace to our patrols. He must be driven out...the men behind the machine guns are fanatics, some are chained to the weapons. One by one, they must be blasted from the earth that hides them.”¹⁶

The Japanese in this film, much like *Bataan*, were always hiding. Whether it is hiding in the grass, in the jungle, in the trees, in the ocean, or in caves, the Japanese soldiers are always

¹⁴“Guadalcanal Diaries,” directed by Louis Sieler (November 17, 1943).

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

hidden, but not invisible. The Japanese attack from under cover of night or jungle, and unlike *Bataan*, the Japanese soldiers in *Guadalcanal Dairies* does not attack all out. The Japanese soldiers are crowded into caves, almost as if to be shown as hiding rats. Along with that, racial descriptions that are associated with the Japanese, such as ‘monkeys’, ‘buck-teeth’, and other such words were common in the soldiers’ and narrators’ dialogue. There are even very subtle things such as an image of a Japanese soldier with glasses. When the Japanese begin dropping flyers to reassure their people of the Japanese victory, American soldiers make fun of them, as if to point out how stupid the Japanese are for creating propaganda in an American propaganda film. Another slight touch of irony is that while in *Guadalcanal Diaries*, when “The Japanese troops have withdrawn into the interior of the island, and the marines are in for a long tough battle. This strategy, praised when undertaken by American troops in *Bataan* and other movies, is presented as devious and unfair when done by the Japanese.”¹⁷

The OWI praised *Guadalcanal Diaries* as “the most realistic and outstanding picture” about the Pacific war, and on its portrayal of the Japanese enemy as formidable but not invincible.¹⁸ Like *Bataan*, *Gaudacanal Dairies* was recommended for overseas distribution.

And with critics it too was praised, especially by Bosley Crowther of *New York Times*, who noted that the opening audience “...was visibly stirred and which, no doubt, had the impression that it was witnessing the battle of Guadalcanal as it was fought.”¹⁹ He also said that “...there is certainly no question that this picture is stirring and inspiring in many ways....”²⁰

¹⁷Koppes, 259.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 260.

¹⁹Morella, 157.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 158.

Both *Bataan* and *Guadalcanal Diaries* were hailed by the OWI as successful war films, and were also examples of how easily the OWI would overlook the blatant racist portrayals of the Japanese. Although the OWI claimed to not want Japanese soldiers to become simply things for the Americans to kill, yet that was the image portrayed in both *Bataan* and *Guadalcanal Diaries*. Nobody ever objected, or even mentioned a possible change to the film makers.²¹ Although not subtle, the racist imageries in *Bataan* and *Guadalcanal Diaries* could potentially be missed.

Throughout all of the wartime films about the Pacific front, several reoccurring themes appear. There were barely any films that talked about combat, and the only ones that did focused on the European front. The few films that existed talked about combat were "... extremely redundant in their arguing their justification of America in war, this redundancy exists both within each film and from film to film"²² but the majority of films were focused on "thematic concerns even propaganda may have been original imputice [sic] for production, but the end result is a body of films which creates and idealized world...it is a world governed by a metaphysic of perfect order, of universal truths of men, and of absolutes of good and evil."²³

In order for the OWI to achieve its message, it had to not only create the heroic American, but they also had to create the enemy. Often to make sure there was no confusion as to who was good and who was evil, American films used opposite attributes. While the American heroes were emotional, religious, peaceful and moderate, the Japanese and Germans were portrayed as dispassionate, atheist, hostile and fanatic. While the Germans and Japanese

²¹Koppes, 258-259.

²²Kathryn Kane, *Visions of War: Hollywood Combat Films of World War II* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Umi Research Press, 1982), 145.

²³*Ibid.*, 147.

were both enemies of the Americans, there was a difference. “In contrast to the ‘good German’ and the occasional good Nazi, the Good Japanese were almost unheard of.”²⁴

Unlike the Germans, the Japanese were portrayed by racial stereotypes. While the German people were unwillingly put under the rule of the Nazis, there was never any question that the Japanese were evil, nor were the Japanese ever unwilling to follow an order. There were no good Japanese. Furthermore “no attempt was made to show a Japanese soldier trapped in circumstances beyond his control, or a family man who longed for a home, or an officer who despised the militarists even if he supported the military campaign. This stands in sharp contrast to the portrayal of the German soldiers, who were often shown as decent human beings, distinct from the Nazis.”²⁵

“By the spring of 1942, the racial epithets were flying fast; ‘monkey’ was the most common along with its variants ‘monkey people’ and ‘ringtails.’ When ‘rat’ was used, it was prefixed by ‘yellow’ or ‘slant-eyed.’”²⁶ The use of animals to describe the Japanese helped to create the inferiority and inhumanity of the Japanese. “Subhuman, inhuman, lesser human, super human— all that was lacking in the perception of the Japanese enemy was a human like oneself.”²⁷ Combined with the imagery of monkeys or rats, the Japanese were shown to be inhuman. The dehumanization of the enemy was specifically a tactic used on the portrayal of the Japanese. This tactic was highly successful, to the point that many soldiers fighting in the Pacific could not recognize the humanity of the Japanese. To the point that even Ernie Pyle, a claimed

²⁴Bernard F. Dick, *Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 231.

²⁵Koppes, 254.

²⁶Dick, 230.

²⁷Dower, 9.

“humanist” wrote after seeing Japanese prisoners in a fenced-in enclosure that “they were wrestling and laughing and talking just like normal human beings, and yet they gave me the creeps, and I wanted a mental bath after looking at them.”²⁸ Furthermore, he also wrote that “in Europe we felt that our enemies, horrible and deadly as they were, were still people, but out here I soon gathered that the Japanese were looked upon as something subhuman and repulsive; the way some people feel about cockroaches or mice.”²⁹

Race became vital in the fighting of the Japanese. There was no good Japanese, and so the American Japanese were quickly put away, while the rest of the American society was meant to hate them. “The racist code words and imagery that accompanied the war in Asia were often exceedingly graphic and contemptuous. The Western allies persisted in their notion of the ‘subhuman’ nature of the Japanese, routinely turning to images of apes and vermin to convey this.”³⁰ Racist phrases like “Slap that Jap” and “yellow terror” became popularized quickly. Prior to the war in the Pacific, Asians were seen as indistinguishable masses of identical clones, but with China’s role of a vital and important ally in the Pacific War, American media had to define and highlight the differences between the ‘good’ Asians and the ‘bad’ ones.³¹ Generally, the Chinese were seen as peaceful, gentle, brave, honest, religious and fertile people while the Japanese were warmongering, treacherous, sly, cruel and brutal monsters.

Another persistent image portrayed “the Japanese as naughty children who needed to be punished by the white Americans and Europeans. This exaggerated the contrast suggested a

²⁸*Ibid.*, 78.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*, 9.

³¹Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 135.

hierarchical and paternal relationship that...existed between the United States and Japan.”³² The odd mixture of paternalism and violent racism were intertwined in American portrayals of the Japanese. But, interestingly, these images were not meant to create hatred, just direct the natural proclivity toward hatred. “In *Communiqué*, the in-house weekly of the Hollywood Writers Mobilization, Nelson Poynter was asked ‘is it true that the office of war information does not want pictures which will promote hatred of the Japanese and the Nazis?’ ‘No,’ replied the OWI’s Hollywood chief, ‘properly directed hatred is of vital importance to the war effort’”³³

Properly directed hatred was a very clear mission of the OWI, with their refusal to show images of the Emperor Hirohito, fearing that it would change the direction of the hatred towards the Japanese. Furthermore, the government used race and nationality as an enemy, rather than a leader, in order to justify the internment of the Japanese-Americans. The problem was that the properly directed hatred worked and by 1942, when polled, 73% of the American population believed the Japanese people were treacherous, 63% thought they were sly, 56% believed the Japanese were cruel and 46% believed they were warlike.³⁴

The effectiveness of this ‘properly directed hatred’ was clear. The Allied wartime leader, Admiral Haisley, known for advocating genocide of the Japanese, was met with popularity not only within the military but also within the American population. Admiral Haisley reported back to the American public saying that: “We are drowning and burning [them] all over the pacific

³²Kryustyn R. Moon, “There’s no Yellow in Red, White, and Blue”: The Creation of Anti-Japanese Music During World War II,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 72:3 (2000), 339.

³³Doherty, 122.

³⁴Moon, 335.

and it is just as much pleasure to burn them as to drown them.”³⁵ And the majority of this acceptance came from film, as noted, “The movie goer is much in the position of a hypnotized person. Spellbound by the luminous rectangle before his eyes—which resembles the glittering object in the hand of a hypnotist—he cannot help succumbing to the suggestions that invade the blank of his mind. Film is an incomparable instrument of propaganda.”³⁶ Even the OWI was convinced film was the key to injecting the proper message to the American population. “The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most peoples minds,” admitted the director of the OWI Elmer Davis “is to let it go in through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize they are being propagandized.”³⁷

In the end, *Know Your Enemy—Japan* was the last of the anti-Japanese films produced. *Know Your Enemy—Japan* was produced by Frank Capra and shown to United States soldiers first, as a requirement in training, and then later to civilians. Although conceptualized in 1942, because of scripting and production problems, *Know Your Enemy—Japan* was only released three-days after the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima and, so, was obsolete from its release.³⁸ However, had the film come earlier, it would have been the most powerful, blatant and racist production to have met the hungry American audiences. *Know Your Enemy—Japan* sets up the OWI’s view of Japanese history and culture, as well as establishing some sort of nation-wide conspiracy to take over the whole world. The film is so ridiculous, it stops just short of placing

³⁵Nancy Barcak Pavia, “Racism in Japanese and U.S. Propaganda,” *The Historian*, 53:4 (Summer 1994), 14.

³⁶W. Anthony Sheppard, “An Exotic Enemy: Anti-Japanese Musical Propaganda in World War II Hollywood,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 54:2 (Summer 2001), 309.

³⁷Christie, 55.

³⁸William J. Blakefield, “A War Within: The Making of *Know Your Enemy—Japan*,” *Sight and Sound*, 52 (1983), 128.

the cackling Japanese in a maniacal tower of darkness (with lightening and dark clouds, too).

Know Your Enemy—Japan is the epiphany of racism towards the Japanese during World War II.

Know Your Enemy—Japan is presented in form of a documentary, compiled of both American film and Japanese film shot by the Japanese themselves. Frank Capra knew very well that a documentary form would function to provide a truth, and so he used film taken from the Japanese too, to help his argument. John Grierson had defined documentary as ‘the creative treatment of actuality,’ but looking at the work of Leni Riefenstahl and her productions for the Nazi government (*Triumph of the Will*), a whole new vision of documentaries was present to the world.

Frank Capra was shocked by the power of *Triumph of the Will* and made two decisions immediately. First he would use the footage to condemn the mob psychology so blatant in *TOW*’s rally scenes, parades and tableaux. Second, Frank Capra believed that the documentaries of the series could equal—if not surpass—Riefenstahl’s accomplishments.... Although he would be working with actuality material, Capra knew that he could manipulate images and sound to prove that there were fundamental American reasons for joining the European [and Asian] struggle. Granted, the democracies had vacillated, but they would confront a demonic enemy and thereby experience their own ‘triumph of the will.’³⁹

The form of the movie would have been perfect to prepare soldiers to enter battle in Japan, since it supposedly gave facts on the Japanese ‘character’. “All of the films assertions as well as its cinematic techniques are designed to instill fear and hatred of the Japanese in American viewers,”⁴⁰ and instill fear it does. With a bastardized history of Japan and Japanese culture is given as an explanation for why the war is going on (other than the attack on Pearl Harbor). The film presents so-called historical facts or proofs to show Japan’s desire to dominate the world, using quotes from Japanese officials and past emperors’ declarations such as: “The

³⁹Peter C Rollins, “Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* film series and our American Dream,” *Journal of American Culture*, 19:4 (Winter 1996), 81.

⁴⁰Claudia Springer, “Military Propaganda: Defense Department Films from World War II and Vietnam,” *Cultural Critique*, 3 (Spring, 1986), 152.

Sword is our steel bible.” This penchant was shown very early in the film, and again later on, by using a quote from Japan’s first divine emperor, Jimmu, telling Japan to: “Let us extend the capital and cover the eight corners of the world under one roof.”⁴¹ The purpose was to show Japan’s world-dominating doctrine.

Know Your Enemy—Japan did exactly what the OWI hoped for in films—presenting the Japanese enemy as inhuman and formidable, but defeat-able. The film stipulates that the Japanese soldier can carry as much weight as he himself weighs; and survive on little more than rice, making the Japanese appear very alien and inhuman. The film explains that Japanese are the same, like “...photographic prints off the same negative.”⁴² The film also explains that there has been a cultural conspiracy to rule the world since the beginning of Japan; that they were always dangerous, and always wearing a mask of friendship before stabbing everyone else in the back. The film makes no attempt to see the Japanese as anything beyond a mass of culprits or murderers. *Know Your Enemy—Japan* uses imagery of Japanese children and women to show the evils of their society. “Japanese mothers are accused of lacking maternal feelings as they ‘accept the ashes of their dead soldiers without grief or sorrow,’”⁴³ and that “Children who have learned their lessons well bear witness to Japanese militarism.”⁴⁴

The film even claims that “Other Japanese traveled widely as tourists, photographing the sights of Honolulu and Seattle. Something to show the folks back home. Still others went to work in barber shops, strange barbers who didn’t talk. This information was collected, studied,

⁴¹“Know your Enemy—Japan,” Directed by Frank Capra (August 9, 1945).

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

filed away in Tokyo, ready for the day the army decided to go into action.”⁴⁵ *Know Your Enemy—Japan* also uses various animated clips from Walt Disney Studios to show just how evil the Japanese were and how hell-bent they were on world domination, such as the image of Japan as a giant octopus, slowly surrounding the islands in the Pacific and then clamping down on them. As if the animations were not subtle enough, the narrator declares to the audience, “Defeating this nation is as necessary as shooting the mad dog in your neighborhood.”⁴⁶

There is no doubt that racism was imbedded deeply in American attitudes during World War II. And there is also no doubt that media influences the public’s opinion. How easily people are influenced by what the media tells them? The American government needed to shift Americans’ opinions, sharpen their hatred and direct their efforts in the war against Japan. Encouraging and using racist imagery was perfect for the American government to control media, and most importantly, Hollywood. Properly directed hatred -- and more importantly, properly directed racism, was the US government’s key to winning the war against Japan.

The idea of government influencing public opinion was not uniquely American. The Japanese government established their own propaganda effort under the authority of the Home Ministry, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Welfare. This formed the Office of Public Information that functioned under the Home Ministry. The Home Ministry laid out instructions for the content of films which the Office of Public Information followed up on. Similar to the OWI, the Home Ministry wanted to push certain themes and avoid others. Among these, scenes of excess merriment and corruption were to be avoided. Making light of military matters were

⁴⁵*Ibid.* This quote is especially ironic since in the beginning of the film, a caption told the audience that Japanese living in America were fully American citizens and were helping to fight for America just as much as everyone else—yet this quote says directly the opposite.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

also strictly forbidden. Themes of patriotism, patience, fidelity, filial piety, resignation and most importantly, the “Spirit of Sacrifice” were common in wartime Japanese films.

When Japan entered World War II, it did so as a nation that had not been conquered in its entire history. In fact, at the time of the Battle of Midway in 1942, Japan had gone nearly three-and-a-half centuries without a single defeat. Not since the Japanese retreat from Korea in 1597 had Japan’s military been repelled. Japan had been at war since its occupation of Manchuria in 1928. For nearly 14 years, Japan’s military had enjoyed staggering success in its quest to create a Pacific Empire. When the Japanese attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Japan and the United States were now officially combatants in the war. Pearl Harbor was an absolute success for the Japanese military machine.

Japanese film propaganda had been produced since the Japanese invasion of China. In China, Japan’s use of propaganda films was extensive. After Japan's invasion of China, movie houses were among the first establishments to be reopened.⁴⁷ Most of the materials being shown were war newsreels, Japanese motion pictures, or propaganda shorts paired with traditional Chinese films.⁴⁸ Movies were also used in other conquered Asian countries usually with the theme of Japan as Asia’s savior against the Western tyrants or spoke of the history of friendly relations between the countries with films such as, *The Japan You Don't Know*.⁴⁹ China was a favorite subject of Japanese film makers and many films had a romantic theme between a

⁴⁷Robert Spencer Ward, *Asia for the Asiatics?: The Techniques of Japanese Occupation*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 56.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹David Desser, "From the Opium War to the Pacific War: Japanese Propaganda Films of World War II," *Film History*, 7:1 (1995), 39.

Japanese officer and a Chinese woman.⁵⁰ This may have been a way for the Japanese to demonstrate their goodwill toward China and thus the greater realm of Asian nations being conquered.

But Japanese films were very different from American wartime propaganda films in three distinctive ways: how the enemy was portrayed, what actions the hero takes, and, most importantly, for what audience was the film created.

Although the differences in the first two would seem obvious (after all, the Japanese were by no means the Americans, or vice versa) what was surprisingly missing from Japanese films were blatant characterizations of the enemy. In Japanese wartime cinema, obvious portrayals of the 'enemy' were surprisingly absent; however, hovering in the background, distant and rarely pointed out one can still find 'the enemy' in Japanese films.⁵¹ "There is simply no 'enemy' counterpart in Japanese films to the atrocities and subhuman 'Jap' beloved of Hollywood. Even when the Japanese undertook to produce explicit 'hate-the-enemy' films, they generally did this in the form of historical dramas depicting the onerous behavior of earlier generations of western imperialists in Asia."⁵² The 'other' in Japanese films are simply those who are not Japanese (Chinese and other southeast-Asians), and unlike American films, 'others' were not necessarily 'the enemy.' Japanese films, unlike the American wartime films made no attempt to make 'the enemy' seem as a strength that must be defeated -- rather as a pitiful weakling to be brushed aside.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹ Abe Mark Nornes and Kukushima Yukio, eds. *The Japan/America Film Wars: WWII Propaganda and Its Cultural Contexts* (Tokyo: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), 240.

⁵²Desser, 45.

The value of Japanese propaganda film efforts were praised -- even by Japan's enemy, the United States: "...after studying a number of Japanese wartime films for their propaganda potential during the war, Frank Capra is supposed to have said 'We can't beat this kind of thing. We can make films like these maybe once in a decade.'"⁵³

This success was used in a purely propagandist film a year later in the film: *Hawai Mare oki Kaisen* (1942). *The War at Sea From Hawaii to Malay*, as is its English title, was directed by Kajiro Yamamoto. The film was made to commemorate the one year anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor -- the "Navy Spirit as culminated at Pearl Harbor."⁵⁴ Yamoamoto carefully re-created the years of preparation for the attack. The film showed the complete destruction of American ships by Japanese dive bombers and was the pinnacle of Japan's propaganda films. Despite the film's subject matter, Yamamoto put together an exquisite combination of real footage and battlefield reproductions using miniatures. The fake battle scenes, added in with the real footage, made it impossible for audiences (both American and Japanese) to tell which scenes had been created and what was the actual battle field. "So effective were these studio shots that after the war Occupation authorities mistook some of them for the real thing."⁵⁵

The War at Sea From Hawaii to Malay was a gigantic film in every sense of the word and cost of \$380,000 to make, when the average first-class film was budgeted for \$40,000.⁵⁶ The film, however, was popular and made its investment back quickly. Yamamoto's film was used in the later years of the war as a means of boosting public morale. *War at Sea from Hawaii to*

⁵³Nornes and Yukio, 132.

⁵⁴Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie, *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 131.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

Malaya won the special prize by the Information Board the year it was released, and although non-fictional, it was presented in an almost fictional light. The film's purpose was to inspire the Japanese to fight and it certainly did that.⁵⁷

Other films attempted to show an enemy with more detail, but ended up twisting the film to focus on the hero. In the film *Tiger of Malaya* (1943) -- although the enemy is British -- the main focus of the film is on the Japanese hero. The *Tiger of Malaya*, however, was unique in that it had a very 'caricature' like portrayal of the British Imperialists, showing acts of brutality. This film was important for its portrayal of the British Enemy, even if the majority of the film was devoted to the unity of the 'bandits' fighting the British. "As is clear from many of the hate-the-enemy films, Britain, more than the United States, was the favorite target."⁵⁸ Other films, *The Last Days of the British Empire*, was a self explanatory ending of the war with Britain. A more unusual anti-British film, *International Smuggling Game*, depicted the British Consular Service running an opium smuggling ring, with which the British consul, Mr. Perkins, weaves a Machiavellian scheme for subduing Japan as the British had subdued China.⁵⁹

The Japanese film industry instead focused inward -- producing "...some of the most vivid evocations of the ideal Japanese life and behaviors."⁶⁰ All genres of Japanese film during the war followed the same ultranationalist themes: filial piety, fidelity, patriotism, patience and resignation. The "Spirit of Sacrifice" was a key point in all films of the time. The difference between 'self' and 'other' in Japanese films was stressed greatly. However, unlike in American

⁵⁷Desser, 40.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁹Anthony Rhodes, *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion -- World War II* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1976), 242.

⁶⁰Desser, 43.

films where the 'other' is a sub-human creature to be defeated or annihilated, the representation of otherness in Japanese cinema was simply a community that did not share the nationalist thinking of the Japanese. "Many Japanese war films have no explicit enemies at all; the focus remains almost exclusively on the pure self. Others portray enemies only abstractly in the form of a distant plane, a running figure, the chatter of a machine gun or boom of field artillery."⁶¹ The foe is simply identified as "they."

The majority of Japanese films were directed at these others, to fall under the protection of the Japanese "co-prosperity sphere". The whole focus of most films were on self and other, rarely the enemy. Missing from Japanese films was "the element of caricature which, however dishonestly, managed to frighten a good many westerners, and which American hate-the-enemy films always insisted upon."⁶²

Although painting a story of 'self' and 'other' in a time of war when the focus should be on the enemy might seem strange, but the Japanese believed in the purity of the Yamamoto race. The enemy was not the important factor -- it was how the Japanese people were which led to a simple conclusion: as long as the Japanese were pure, the enemy would fall, so it was not important to focus on the enemies.

Hate-the-enemy portrayals in Japanese cinema was far less virulent and shocking than many of the notorious instances in Hollywood films.⁶³ This fact, however, leads to an interesting observation about how the war was waged. Japanese cinema was almost wholly at

⁶¹John W. Dower, *Japan in War & Peace: Selected Essays* (New York: New Press, 1993), 39.

⁶²Nornes and Yukio, 135.

⁶³In other forms of propaganda, the Japanese did dehumanize the enemy and call for their extermination. In wartime cartoons as well as popular colloquialisms, for example, it was commonplace to depict the Americans and British as demons, devils and monsters. Exhortations

at odds with the war waged by the Japanese military; and the same holds true for the obverse, Hollywood. This is to say, that the pan-Asianism...expressed in [Japanese films] ...is belied by the extreme exploitation and violence directed against other Asians. Similarly, the often virulent racism seen in American World War II combat films is belied not only by American conduct in World War II (humane treatment of POWs, for instance) but also by American society itself.”

As Western scholars have critiqued Hollywood’s racist propaganda, they are perhaps guilty of a kind of reverse discrimination because these same scholars praise Japanese cinema for its lack of race-baiting and prejudice. Scholars have failed “to include a consideration of the actual war waged by the respective combatants. A full appreciation for Japanese war-time filmmaking must not only take into consideration the full range of Japanese cinema of the period, but also the war in support of which the films were made.”⁶⁴

During the American Occupation of Japan, headed by the Supreme Commander for Allied Powers (SCAP), films that were deemed anti-American, anti-Democratic, or simply ‘unfit’ for the new Japan, were completely destroyed. Banned subject included any criticisms of the allied countries from any time even before the war. Any form of imperial, anti-ally media was destroyed, including a vast number of films. Those that are left are those who fit within the SCAP guidelines -- meaning that they did not necessarily fit with the true portrait of World War II Japanese perspective.

Dawn of Freedom is one of the very few films that survived the Occupations ‘purge’ of media. The story of how the film survived in and of itself is a extraordinary tale: the only surviving copy of the film was captured by the Filipino Resistance on orders from General Douglas MacArthur. They took the film from a theatre where it had just finished showing and hid the prints in various cargo, from mangos to horse feed and smuggled the film into Australia

to kill the “‘devilish Anglo-Americans’ were uttered with mounting fervor as the Allied powers closed in on the home islands.” Dower, 39-40.

⁶⁴Desser, 45.

via truck, push-cart, boat and submarine. *Dawn of Freedom* in fact, is one of only three of the films that were lucky enough to survive the purging of Japan. Beyond its miraculous survival story, it was also unique because it was one of the first Japanese-Philippine “co-produced” films. Of course, the Filipinos working on the film were often under the gun, literally, and American POWs were used in the film, against their will.

The story of *Dawn of Freedom* focuses on the Filipino town of Manila. The film covers the surrender of the town to Japanese troops by American forces. In the film, a child, little Tony’s brother is serving in the Army, and he writes to him, telling him to bring him back an enemy (Japanese) helmet. But soon, he realizes he was wrong when he is injured by an American military officer and receives a life-saving blood transfusion by a Japanese soldier. Later in the film, his brother is murdered by an American officer. Before dying, the brother writes a message on his helmet telling his little brother that “...the real enemies are the Americans”⁶⁵

Dawn of Freedom was received well in Japan, as reviewer Tsumura Hideo from *Eiga Hyoron* complimented “the quality of [Leonardo Salcedo] being slaughter in the mountains by an [American] plot” and gave overall good reviews about the movie, calling the movie an attempt to “create a new sublime beauty which can only be deprived from beauty of cruelty”⁶⁶ It was also rich with images of the Japanese ‘self’ and the American ‘enemy’: “The Japanese portrayed themselves as ethical, benevolent liberators, while the Americans are vicious and bloodthirsty.”⁶⁷ Through the Filipino ‘others’ in the film, the audience can ‘discover’ the true nature of the two forces, like little Tony. To other Asians watching this film, the message is clear: American Imperialists are the enemy, under Japanese rule, you will find betterment.

⁶⁵Nornes and Yukio, 241.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 240.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 241.

But the Japanese were not making their films to necessarily be shown to Japanese people. In fact, Japanese produced films were shown in Japanese territories in Southeast Asia and China. For example, the film *China Moon* is about a Chinese orphan who falls in love with a Japanese Naval Officer. It had three different endings, but only one ending was seen in Japan, the other two endings were shown in China or the rest of Southeast Asia. In the Chinese ending, the couple lives together, happily ever after. In the Southeastern Asian ending, the Japanese Naval officer saves his love from committing suicide. But the Japanese ending shows her committing suicide successfully. This may seem confusing at first, but when we look at the messages the Japanese were trying to send to these places it makes a lot of sense.

To the 'others' in China, the message is clear: Unite with Japan, and you will be happy. To the 'others' in southeast Asia, the message is that Japan will save them. But to the Japanese people, the focus is on 'self,' and the purifying of the Japanese Naval Officer from the 'other' of the Chinese. The enemy presence in the film is simple: the Japanese Officer would not have been there if the enemy wasn't. But the enemy never makes an appearance, subtle or otherwise.

Here we have the split in Japanese and American propaganda films. The focus of Japanese films is on self, but the Americans focus on the other. The war-time climate can fuel the intensity of racial hatred through a hardening of boundaries "along the dichotomous split between 'us' and 'them.'"⁶⁸ The strength and power that the Americans and Japanese fought with could be partially attributed to the way they viewed their respective enemy. The brutality of the Pacific War proved truly that if "you call a people 'barbarian'...or you call a group

⁶⁸Nornes and Yukio, 100.

‘criminals’” you can “suspend just laws of Decency and behave towards them in an otherwise criminal way.”⁶⁹

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 99.

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